

# Help Is Available for Your Emotional Pain and Distress

Together We Can. 

*Suicide Prevention Information for Veterans,  
Their Families, and Caregivers*

## The Ways Someone Becomes Suicidal Are Complex

Have you ever seen a suicide depicted in a movie or a TV show? Read about one in a novel? Heard about one in the news? Often, writers and reporters blame suicides on a single cause. For example, they may say the victims killed themselves because they were bullied, lost their jobs, or were mentally ill. Entertainment and news media may also glorify or romanticize suicide, portraying it as inevitable or the only way some people can cope with distress.

The truth is, there are usually multiple things that motivate individuals to think about suicide or engage in suicidal behavior, and those factors are often complex, highly personal, contextual, and even cultural. No single explanation adequately explains why individuals turn to suicide.

Psychological pain seems to be the common thread among people who are suicidal. When we experience unbearable psychological pain (intense emotional distress or suffering), we naturally desire to be free of the pain. This unbearable pain can result from many different feelings, such as shame, guilt, loneliness, burdensomeness, boredom, unhappiness, defeat, anger, and emptiness. If a person finds the pain unbearable and feels like it will never get better (that is, they despair and don't have hope for the future), suicide can seem like the only option.

People become more at risk for suicide the more they despair and the more hopeless they feel. They don't necessarily want to die; they just want to relieve their pain. People who have attempted suicide often describe being in a state of ambivalence — wanting to live but unable to see a way to go on in the midst of their suffering.

Also, unlike in media portrayals, suicidal thoughts tend to come and go and quickly change in intensity. Suicidal thinking — as well as related feelings such as hopelessness, loneliness, and feeling like a burden on others — can change considerably in just a few hours. This is why temporarily securing highly lethal means, such as firearms, is an effective suicide prevention strategy.

## Healthy Ways to Deal With Psychological Pain For Veterans

You are not alone. Mental health professionals can offer support. For example, therapists can help you explore your thoughts and feelings in a nonjudgmental way and work with you to alleviate the pain caused by unhelpful beliefs and negative thoughts. They can also help you identify ways to become more connected with others.

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Sometimes, it may be difficult to reach out to others, especially if the relationship has a lot of conflict and tension. Unfortunately, family conflict is also a risk factor for suicide, so working to improve relationships with one another can be one way to reduce suicide risk. VA offers family counseling options to help.

## Be There for a Veteran in Your Life

You don't need special training to **Be There** for someone who may be in crisis. Everyone can play a role in preventing Veteran suicide. Approaching the subject may seem difficult, but it is crucial to start the conversation. For more information, visit [BeThereForVeterans.com](https://www.BeThereForVeterans.com).



## Get Immediate Help



Veterans who are in crisis or having thoughts of suicide, and those who know a Veteran in crisis, should contact the Veterans Crisis Line for confidential support available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year:

- Call **1-800-273-8255 and Press 1**.
- Send a text message to **838255**.
- Chat online [VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat](https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/Chat).

For more ways to find help, visit [www.veteranscrisisline.net/get-help/local-resources](https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/get-help/local-resources).



## Know the Signs

Signs of a suicidal crisis may vary for each person but could include changes in mood and activities, an increase in alcohol or drug use, expressions of hopelessness, agitation, or withdrawal from others. If you notice these behaviors, **Be There** for the person in need.



## Ask the Question

VA, in collaboration with PsychArmor Institute ([psycharmor.org](https://www.psycharmor.org)), developed the S.A.V.E. online training video, which describes how you can act with care and compassion if you encounter a Veteran who is in suicidal crisis.

**S** – Recognize the **signs** of suicidal thinking.  
**A** – **Ask** the question: Are you thinking of ending your life?  
**V** – **Validate** the Veteran's experience.  
**E** – **Encourage** treatment and **expedite** getting help.  
Access the S.A.V.E. training at [BeThereForVeterans.com](https://www.BeThereForVeterans.com).



## Resources for Veterans, Families, Friends, and Caregivers

- **VA Caregiver Support** can connect you with a local Caregiver Support Coordinator and offer additional resources. Visit [www.caregiver.va.gov](https://www.caregiver.va.gov) or call 855-260-3274.
- **Coaching Into Care** aims to educate, support, and empower family members and friends who are seeking care or services for a Veteran. Call 888-823-7458 or visit [www.mirecc.va.gov/coaching](https://www.mirecc.va.gov/coaching).
- **Make the Connection** connects Veterans, their family members and friends, and other supporters with information and solutions to issues affecting their lives. Visit [MakeTheConnection.net](https://www.MakeTheConnection.net).
- **CaringBridge**, a social networking platform helps service members, Veterans, and their caregivers and families communicate with and support loved ones during their health journeys. Visit [military.caringbridge.org/a/](https://military.caringbridge.org/a/).
- **Objective Zero**, a free mobile app from the Objective Zero Foundation, connects service members, Veterans, their families and caregivers with suicide prevention resources and peer support through videoconferencing, voice calls, and text. Download the app: [www.objectivezero.org/app](https://www.objectivezero.org/app).